

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The invention describes catabolism of A $\beta$  by endothelin converting enzymes (ECEs). Methods of identifying compounds that upregulate ECEs are provided by the invention. Further provided by the invention are methods of regulating A $\beta$  catabolism in a cell and methods of decreasing the amount of A $\beta$  in a cell. The invention discloses methods of diagnosing an individual with AD and methods of treating such an individual. The invention further discloses methods of identifying compounds that have anti-hypertension activity but do not cause an increase in the level of A $\beta$ . Further, the invention provides mutant ECE nucleic acids and mutant ECE polypeptides.

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